



Utah Department of Health

Healthy Rewards for Active Kids

The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) is concerned about the obesity trend in Utah and in the nation. One in four Utah students, grades K-8, is overweight or at risk of becoming overweight—that's enough children to fill 2,067 elementary school classrooms. Most children are overweight because they lack good eating habits and don't get enough physical activity. The problem isn't just about weight, it's an epidemic of physical inactivity and poor nutrition.

Youth sports and other recreation programs are a great way to get kids moving and to prevent excess weight gain. They also help kids develop lean muscle mass. Such programs can help children develop a love for being active and to establish healthy habits that can last a lifetime.

The health benefits of youth sports and recreation are compromised when poor quality food is given as a team treat. The tradition of rewarding kids with high calorie, low nutrient foods such as candy, donuts, and cookies can be easily replaced. Feed kids healthy snacks so they get the right message—that real athletes fuel their bodies with healthy foods.

Treats are usually not a required part of recreation so UDOH urges parents and coaches to be mindful of what foods are offered during and after games. Consider following these tips:

For one-hour recreation and sporting events:

- Encourage players to eat meals at least one hour before games and come fueled up!
- All players should bring a bottle filled with cold water
- Most athletes just need water; drink more water when the temperature climbs
- Kids under age 8 usually need just water and should have a healthy snack before the game

For events lasting up to two hours:

- Drink water or a sports drink throughout game, especially during halftime or time-outs
- Provide orange slices or another healthy snack at halftime or time-outs for age 8 or younger
- Parents know their children best and should be in charge of maintaining their child's energy



If coaches and parents decide to offer snacks:

- Consider setting nutritional guidelines for treats
- Provide water or sports drinks instead of any juice based or soda drink
- Bring fruit as a snack—oranges, bananas or washed apples or grapes
- Provide granola bars, cheese sticks, yogurt, pretzels, nuts or baked chips
- Be considerate when snacks are provided as many meal times directly follow activities
- Avoid weekly treats and hold an end-of-season party where a healthy meal can be served
- Don't tell the kids they are getting healthful snacks, chances are they won't even notice!

In addition to organized, group sports activities there are lots of other fun ways to be physically active as a family. The most important thing is to let kids play. Get off of the couch! Spend time outside with your children and it will help the whole family. Try these ideas with your children:

- Play your favorite Frisbee game
- Stay cool playing freeze tag
- Go to your favorite playground
- Show your skill at hopscotch
- Pretend you're a major leaguer with wiffle ball
- Get crazy with dodgeball
- Play beachball volleyball
- Go on a bike ride

It doesn't matter which game you play, just have fun!

Remember, eating and physical activity habits are formed early in life. Help your children develop healthy habits so that they are better prepared to reach their full potential.

For more information, contact your state or local health department. 